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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: EAST JERUSALEM PROPERTY CONTROVERSIES ESCALATE

REF: A. JERUSALEM 2063
[1](#)B. TEL AVIV 2514
[1](#)C. JERUSALEM 2077
[1](#)D. JERUSALEM 2020

Classified By: Consul General Daniel Rubinstein
for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: In the wake of the Mordot Gilo controversy (Refs A and B), Palestinian officials, local NGOs, and East Jerusalem residents continue to accuse the GOI and Municipality of Jerusalem of attempting to change the demographic balance in Jerusalem. In the past 48 hours, Post has confirmed demolitions at five sites in East Jerusalem (Ref C), the issuance of up to 23 additional demolition orders, postponement of the evacuation of the settler-built Beit Yonatan apartment block in Silwan due to internal municipal politics, and a symbolic cornerstone-laying ceremony at the Nof Zion apartment complex in East Jerusalem, attended by several Knesset members (Ref C). Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat issued a statement noting plans for more than 5,000 new homes in Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, but his staff were unsure of the details, and NGO and Palestinian contacts described the statement as a re-announcement of a previous initiative that remains caught between the Municipality and the Israeli Minister of Interior. End Summary.

MORDOT GILO APPROVAL CRITICIZED BY PALESTINIANS

[1](#)2. (U) Palestinian officials and local NGOs continued to criticize the Israeli Ministry of Interior-controlled Jerusalem District Planning Board's approval on November 17 of the Mordot Gilo project and its referral of the plan for public review. The project would extend the footprint of the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo (beyond the Green Line) towards the Palestinian village of al-Wallaja through the construction of 844 new housing units (Refs A and B). Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat issued a press release stating that Mordot Gilo "provides 900 reasons why hopes for salvaging the two-state solution and re-starting genuine negotiations are rapidly fading, and why Israel is not a partner for peace."

[1](#)3. (U) PLO Chairman of the Department for Jerusalem Affairs Ahmed Qurei said the GOI decision, which he described as a violation of the GOI's Roadmap commitments, was "another nail in the coffin of the peace process." PA Presidency Spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said that President Obama's remarks on East Jerusalem settlement activity in the wake of the Mordot Gilo announcement were "encouraging," but that "the situation requires more pressure on Israel."

DEMOLITIONS RAISE TENSIONS IN EAST JERUSALEM

¶4. (C) NGO contacts and former PA Minister for erusalem Affairs Hatem Abdel Qader reported that local tensions in East Jerusalem were heightened by November 17-18 demolitions (Ref A), and by the issuance of 23 additional demolition orders on November 18: 14 in Issawiya, six in Beit Hanina, and three in Shufat. Municipality Advisor Stephan Miller confirmed to Post on November 12 that that 56 demolitions of Palestinian homes or property had taken place to date in ¶2009. The November 17-18 demolitions bulldozed seven "structures" (using the Municipality's definition) at five separate sites. UNRWA's Michael Neuwirth, a member of UN OCHA's Demolitions Working Group, also counted 64 East Jerusalem demolitions this year as of November 19, which he estimated had displaced 328 people. End Note.

NOF ZION, BEIT YONATON PROMINENT IN LOCAL PRESS

¶5. (U) Meanwhile, local press extensively covered the presence of a Likud Member of the Knesset at a cornerstone-laying ceremony commemorating plans for construction of an additional 105 units at the Nof Zion apartment complex, a privately-funded luxury residential project marketed to largely expatriate non-Arab tenants in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Jabal Mukaber (Ref B).

¶6. (SBU) NGO contacts also highlighted press reports that the court-ordered evacuation of Israeli settlers from Beit Yonatan, an illegally-constructed seven-story building in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan, had been delayed due

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to infighting within the municipality. On November 18, Israeli daily Haaretz reported that Deputy Mayor David Hadari had sent a letter to the municipal Legal Counselor and other senior city officials arguing that Beit Yonatan represented "a symbol of full Israeli sovereignty in all parts of Jerusalem." Municipal sources confirmed the story.

MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS CITE NEUTRAL PROCESS

¶7. (C) Municipal officials maintained that demolition orders and construction starts reflected the normal workings of a neutrally-oriented planning bureaucracy. On November 12, prior to this latest set of home demolitions, Mayoral Advisor Stephan Miller acknowledged to Post that the rate of home demolition was higher in Arab than in Israeli neighborhoods, and that East Jerusalem municipal planning -- on which legal home construction depends -- is of poor quality. However, Miller argued, "illegal construction is illegal construction," and the Municipality does not take either factor into account in implementing demolitions. Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat told the Israeli press on November 18, "Israeli law does not discriminate between Jews and Arabs, and between East and West Jerusalem. The demand to specifically halt construction for Jews is not legal in the U.S. or in any other enlightened country in the world."

NGO CONTACTS DISMISS PLANS FOR PALESTINIAN HOUSING

¶8. (C) Post NGO contacts disputed this characterization, citing a number of hurdles faced by East Jerusalemites seeking legal permission for construction (Ref D). Palestinian and NGO contacts also dismissed a press release issued by Barkat's office on November 18 announcing that municipal planning was underway for 5,000 new Palestinian residential units in East Jerusalem. Abdel Qader said, "instead of making such false claims, the Municipality should freeze all demolition orders, and announce a new policy of facilitating (the issuance of) housing permits to East Jerusalem residents." Jerusalem lawyer and activist Danny Seideman told Post, "hair will grow on the palms of my hands

before one of those (5,000) houses is permitted and built."

19. (C) Seideman added, "when I took (the legality of) Har Homa (settlement) to court in 1996, the government said it was engaged in equitable building for all, that along with Har Homa it was going to build 3,140 new housing units in East Jerusalem. Thirteen years later, you know how many of those units have been built? Zero. Demolitions are always today. Permits and construction always happen in some utopian future." Mayor Barkat's staff were unclear on the details of the Mayor's statement, and were unable to provide information about which municipal planning scheme had authorized the 5,000 units, or what stage of the permitting process they had reached.

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